

## HOME READING.

## CHRIST'S NATIVITY.

Awake, glad heart! get up, and sing!  
It is the birth-day of thy King.  
Awake! awake!  
The sun doth shake  
Light from his locks, and all the day  
Breathing perfumes, doth spice the day.  
A concert make;  
Man is their high priest, and should rise  
To offer up the sacrifice.

I would I were some bird, or star,  
Fluttering in woods, or lifted far,  
Above this time  
And rode of sin!  
Then either star or bird should be  
Shining or singing still to Thee.

I would I had in my best part  
Fit rooms for thee! or that my heart  
Were so clean as  
Thy manger was  
But I am all dirt and obscene;  
Yet, if thou wilt, thou canst make clean.

Sweet Jesus! will then; let no more  
Thine leper hands, and soil thy doors!  
Cure him, ease him,  
O release him!  
And let once more, by mystic birth,  
The Lord of life be born on earth.

—HENRY VICTORIAN [1856].

## ONE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

BY ISOBEL H. REID.

He was employed as a clerk in a large wholesale grocery house in New York, and had been there for years. He was valued for his methodical old-world ways, and if he was a trifle behind the age, he made up for it by good qualities of another sort. His name was James Lindsay, a Scotchman by birth and education, and possessing the usual Scotch thrift and prudence. He had worked hard all his life, supporting first himself, then as the years had passed on, his wife and a daughter. He never believed in spending money without seeing an equivalent for it, and consequently he never believed in giving anything to such intangible things as "Boards," "Societies," etc. And as for the murmured blessings of a beggar, "Tut, tut, mon, I wudna gie a penny to the like o' them!"

But strange to say, on this particular Sunday that came a few days before the Christmas Day, he had heard a sermon, delivered by a young minister of the whole-heartedness of the young, upon charity; and somehow the words had a curious effect upon him. "Let not your neighbor know of your good deeds, but God will know, and He will repay you." Commonplace words, very; but somehow when he said, "I will give some very much in earnest," they meant something. Old James Lindsay, close thrifty, just—not generous old James Lindsay—made up his mind that the day before Christmas he would spend five dollars of his money in charity. Not to give it all in a lump sum to the church, Oh! no, indeed; he had a far wiser scheme than that. He reasoned: "Five dollars is no a fortune to me, and it is five dollars, and five dollars could be divided among several and do much good, if 'twere rightly given. Let me see. Oh! yes, I ken what I'll do; I ken, and he nodded his head seriously up and down as he sat in church, and the young minister, seeing him, felt encouraged to think that there was at least one listener who endorsed his sentiments.

The next day he asked permission of "Bales, Lawson & Co." to be absent half a day the day before Christmas. They looked surprised, but as they could spare him easily, and as he had never been known to ask a favor before, it was readily granted.

Accordingly, on the afternoon of the day before Christmas Mr. Lindsay, with his coat buttoned up close about his neck, and a warm woollen scarf tied outside of that, started out on his mission of charity. He got on the elevated railroad at Chambers Street, and rode up town. He got out at Fourteenth Street. "Such a crowd of folk! I never see the likes o' it before," he murmured to himself as he was taken in with the surging stream of humanity. He stopped and looked in Macy's window, open-eyed at the sight. Then he turned around and looked at the people about him. "Just then a boy spoke to him and said: 'Shine! shine! Mister! Only ten cents; won't you shine for me?'

"No, go away, lad; I no want my utes cleaned noo." Not being familiar with the Scotch accent, the gamin took him for a countryman, and insisted upon putting his custom. "Oh, now, Mister! A poor boy like me! And it's Christmas time, too, and it's only ten cents; think for me, and help a fellow!"

"Weel, I might as well spend ten cents on this way—till I wonder what my wife, Aggie, would say to see me hae'in some one to back my butes for me!" This last reflection caused a smile to glimmer over his face, seeing which the small boy pressed his point, and pulling him by the coat-sleeve out of the dense crowd, led him away to a more roomy space.

"There's yer shan' there, Mister, and I'll be up on us in five seconds; yer won't back yer self, and when yer go home I'll think it's some other feller. A-piff!"

"What's the matter?" said the policeman; "pocket-book?"

"No, it's no my pocket-book, but I have been cheated out o' fifteen cents!"

"Humph!" shrugged the keeper of the peace, "that all? Come—move on—you're blocking up the passage way here, and giving him a shove, he pushed him out into the midst of the surging stream again. Muttering and growling to himself, Lindsay allowed himself to be borne along with the tide. Just as he neared Fifth Avenue the crowd grew less dense, and he stopped a moment to take breath. As he looked about him, he saw leaning up against the iron fence, railing a woman with a pale, pitiful looking face, and a child in her arms. She looked weary and worn, and she held out her hand timidly. He stopped again to see her. "Humph! I have still \$4.75, suppose I gie her fifty?" "Would no doubt be a gift from heaven itself to her—and, yes, she has the bairn, too." Going over to her he said, "Is your chiel sick?" The woman's face looked more pitiful than ever, and raising two humid dark eyes she said, brokenly: "Si, signor, seek."

The old man handed her the fifteen cents. Her face lighted up with surprise at the gift, and she said: "Howe! It's for ye," nodded Lindsay; "expand it prudently, and I'll no be the poorer. Gude day to ye."

The woman poured forth a torrent of thanks in Italian and broken English, to which the old man listened a moment; and then, shaking his head in token of not understanding her, he walked away. After going a few yards he turned and saw the woman putting the shawl more tightly around the child. Something in the shape of the tiny baby's hood, as the back part of it was toward him, brought back a remembrance of his daughter's childhood days, and a longing to see the little face on the other side of it came over him. "Going back to the woman, who looked up expectantly as he approached, he said, shamefacedly, "I say, yae gude woman, wud ye let me see your bairn?" The woman did not understand. "I mean—the baby—the bairn—the wee one," said the old man touching the little cap.

"But no, no, Signor!" cried the woman, suddenly hugging the child closer; "no, no!"

"Dinna be feered, my woman; I dinna want it; just let me look at it," the woman gazed at him uneasily, not yet fully comprehending.

"Ye fool! ye eediot—ye eediot! Ye are daft," he cried twice in less than an hour. "Fool—eediot—eediot—fool!" He ground his teeth with rage and indeed looked rather dangerous.

"I'll just gang away home," said the woman, "deceivin' the pooble in that way!" and rising again on his feet he began to go back toward Sixth Avenue.

As he reached Macy's once more the crowd was something terrible. He was wedged in, and carried toward the entrance before he knew where he was. Following an idle impulse he decided to go inside with the crowd. Once inside and he had plenty to look at. What with the evergreens, the red stars, the flags, the gay colors, the toys and the many and varied articles for sale all around, about and above him, his unaccustomed eyes fairly ached with the looking. Suddenly he decided to spend the rest of his money in something for "the wee one," and "Leezie," his daughter. Gazing about him bewildered he wondered what he had best buy; a weighty question always, but it was a particularly hard one in his case. Suddenly he spied some gay colored silk handkerchiefs. "That'll do," he nodded to himself. Pushing his way over to where they hung he said to one of the girls behind the counter: "What's the price o' that?" "Fifty cents," "I'll tak it, and—hae ye no another sort, for an older-like body?"

"What?" said the girl, staring at him. "Hae ye no another?" "Here, Mary," said another girl, pushing her way forward and advancing toward the old man, wiping away some tears as she understood what the gentleman says: "I'll wait on him." The girls ears had caught his accent, and it was familiar to her. She looked as if she had just been crying, seeing which Lindsay said, "What ees it young woman?"

"What is it you wish, sir?" said the girl, smiling, still with the tears in her eyes. "I wanted a handkerchief some o' lik this, but no so gay," explained Lindsay. "But you're greetin', lass; what ees it?"

"Oh—no matter sir. Here, will this do?" taking out a black and white silk one very prettily striped; "this is 83 cents." "Yes, that'll do—I want it for the wife, ye ken." "Yes," smiled the girl a little sadly. "I know."

"Ye are no Scotch, are ye?" said Lindsay, seeing that she understood him readily. "No—but my mother is! And then, to the great surprise, at the mention of her mother's name she burst out into tears again.

"Tut, tut, lassie!" said the old man, "dinna greet lik that. What ees the matter?"

"Cash! cash!" tapped the girl suddenly on the counter with her pencil, and drying her eyes again. "Cash! here, take these handkerchiefs. Cash, and hurry!" The cash girl made off with her basket, and the young girl turned to Mr. Lindsay.

"Well, I'll tell you what's the matter, sir. I had just been paid, and I had the six dollars right here—right in the corner of this box, and—now—now—its gone! I never thought of any one seeing it, and awhile ago, when I went to look for it, it wasn't there! Some one in the crowd took it, I suppose; and mother, you know, she is sick, and there is only me, and I—we need the money so! However, there's no use crying, I suppose, and the girl wiped her eyes again, although her lips trembled, and a weight, like lead, lay upon her heart.

"This time it was with no cool feeling of charity; but, with a warm thrill of sympathy for her distress, that the old man's hand went into his pocket. Suddenly he drew it out again and reflected. He wasn't going to be fooled again.

"Where do ye live?" he said, abruptly. "Why—what do you want to know for?" said the girl.

"I—I—wud lik to know," stammered Lindsay; "what ees your name?"

"My name is Nellie McDonald. I live in No. 10—Street, top floor." "McDonald? That's a Scotch name. I used to ken one McDonald," said the old man, dreamily; "but that was years ago."

"Fae's been dead a good many years," said the girl, "but we always got along until mother was so sick. And now—to think of my losing that money!"

"What time are ye out o' this?" said Lindsay.

"Oh, not until late to-night. The week before Christmas we're always late, you know."

"Hum," said Lindsay, eyeing the girl critically; "where did ye say ye lived?"

"No. 10—Street," answered the girl, wondering. "But here's your handkerchief, and your change, sir—one thirty-three, and two five and five's forty, and ten's fifty—that's right, sir," counting the change into the old man's hand. He took it, stuck it into his vest pocket, and then said gravely, "Gude day to you."

The girl smiled again, and said, "Good-afternoon, sir."

Lindsay pushed and worked his way out from among the seething mass of humanity very doggedly, and finally reached the pavement outside. He strolled up Sixth Avenue a short distance, thinking, "I may be going to be an eediot again," he growled, "but that lass' face looked honest. Yes, I'll gang to No. 10—Street, and I'll see if it ees as she says." He turned west and walked over toward the river.

Finally he reached the number he was in search of, and found it to be a third-rate boarding house in a poor locality. He went up the steps and pulled the bell. It came out at his pull—it was broken and wouldn't ring. He replaced it and then knocked vigorously on the door. A dirty little girl, of about ten years old, opened it.

"Does a Mrs. McDonald live here?" said Lindsay.

"Yes, on the top floor, back room," said the child.

Lindsay hesitated. A big, slovenly, good natured looking woman poked her head over the banisters, and called down to him. "Are you the agent? If so, we won't let you up!"

"No, my gude woman, I—I—just want to see Mrs. McDonald, and I'll be obliged to ye."

"Oh, walk right up. But you'll have to be good to her," said the fat woman, then, smilingly, "she a poor sick creature, and she can't start no hard words, mind."

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